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Alaska Department of Fish and Game

NEWS

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**.pdf illustration available upon request
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ALASKA SENDS BIRDWATCHERS SOARING WITH NEW CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

JUNEAU – Now birders throughout Alaska and North America will have even more incentive to identify as many birds in the state as possible. "Wings Over Alaska" is a new Alaska Department of Fish and Game program that encourages more people to enjoy Alaska's birds and to take their birding skills to a higher level. Alaska is home to a huge variety of birds – 468 species have been positively identified to date – and makes the 49th state a paradise for birders and a destination for many who hope to see rarities like the Bluethroat, Whiskered Auklet, and Bristle-Thighed Curlew.

Wings Over Alaska participants are awarded certificates for bird species they have seen in Alaska. There are four levels of certification for birders based on identifying 50, 125, 200 and 275 species in the state. The highest level of certificate will be signed by the Governor.

"In order for birders to earn the higher levels of certification, they really need to travel around the state," said program coordinator Karla Hart of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. "Some of the most interesting birding is in rural areas that have an interest in low-impact economic development like birding, so Wings Over Alaska can serve the birders and host communities alike."

Alaska Airlines is providing sponsorship funds to help support the program. The Airline serves 20 communities in the state including many that are seasonal destinations for uncommon species of birds. "This program will help us promote tourism to our communities that don't often get the limelight they deserve," says Greg Latimer, the airline's director of advertising and promotions. "Towns in the Arctic, Southeast Alaska, and the Aleutians are already benefiting from birders who come from far and wide. Our hope is to grow this market, and birders' positive impact on the state."

Wings Over Alaska works on the honor system. Birders may use their existing checklists of the birds they've already seen in Alaska to earn certificates. Hart said she's interested in hearing about any rare or unusual visiting birds that are sighted.

"One thing we will get out of this is more people will be out there consciously watching birds. We hope to get a better idea of abundance and distribution patterns," Hart said.

"We're excited to have Alaska Airlines as our program sponsor." Hart pointed out that Alaska Airlines' western route mimics the Pacific flyway taken by many western birds.

"As spring arrives you can trace the northward migration of shorebirds and cranes up the west coast by birding festivals," Hart said. "The same sandpipers and dunlins celebrated in Arcata, California in mid-April will be celebrated at the Copper River Shorebird Festival in Cordova almost a month later."

To participate in Wings Over Alaska or to learn more, e-mail wingsoveralaska@fishgame.state.ak.us or call 907-465-4190. Certificate applications will be available in mid-April. Certificates will be awarded starting in mid-May.

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IMAGES AVAILABLE Upon request to karla_hart@fishgame.state.ak.us

Wings Over Alaska Willow Ptarmigan certificate (50 Alaska birds)
2.5mb 300 dpi .pdf file, portrait layout.

If this doesn't work for you, we can also provide a .jpg bird photo, choices in vertical and horizontal formats.